

Tiger Moth

Tree-top tents appear early in conifers

Name and Description—*Lophocampa ingens* (H. Edwards) (= *Halisidota ingens* H. Edwards) [Lepidoptera: Arctiidae]

Adult moths have a wingspan of about 3 inches (8 cm); dark, reddish brown forewings that bear large, white oval splotches (fig.1); and white hindwings. Mature caterpillars are about 1 1/2 inches (3.8 cm) long and reddish brown to black in color with tufts of black and yellow hairs on their backs (fig. 2). These hairs have been known to irritate the skin of some people on contact, causing a rash.

A subspecies of the similar looking silver spotted tiger moth *L. argentata subalpina* (French) feeds primarily on juniper and occasionally on pinyon.

Hosts—All native pines are hosts. Less commonly, Douglas-fir and white fir are fed upon during outbreaks.

Life Cycle—The tiger moth has one generation per year. Adult moths emerge and lay eggs in July and August. During September and October, the small, dark-colored, hairy caterpillars hatch from eggs and begin feeding gregariously on needles in the upper branches of host pines, producing silk webbing. Larvae overwinter in the webs in groups and will feed during warmer periods of winter and early spring. A life cycle that includes larval feeding during winter and early spring is quite rare among temperate climate forest defoliator species. In April and May, larvae resume feeding continuously on older needles and expand their webs, binding needles with dense white silk (figs. 3-4). At this time, the larvae and their tent-like webs become very conspicuous. Tiger moth larvae reach maturity very early in the season and are among the largest caterpillars one can find on conifers in spring. Pupation occurs in June.

Damage—Larvae feed on older foliage, sometimes defoliating trees by early spring. They make large silk tents concentrated on the upper branches and tree tops, often enclosing the terminal growth. Tiger moth defoliation tends to be more common on younger pines, but generally occurs in natural, rather than landscape, settings. Although the webs and larvae can be very noticeable in late winter and spring, this insect causes minor defoliation. Permanent tree injury rarely results from feeding, which is usually limited to the upper foliage. Outbreaks are somewhat infrequent and usually collapse within 1 or 2 years.

Management—Populations of tiger moth usually remain at low



Figure 1. Tiger moth adult. Photo: Rocky Mountain Region Archive, USDA Forest Service.



Figure 2. Mature larva of the tiger moth, *Lophocampa ingens*. Photo: Whitney Cranshaw, Colorado State University, Bugwood.org.



Figure 3. Tent with larvae of tiger moth in the top of ponderosa pine. Photo: William M. Ciesla, Forest Health Management International, Bugwood.org.



Figure 4. Tent with larvae of tiger moth in the top of ponderosa pine. Note the dense, silk webbing and consumption of older needles. Photo: Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service.

Tiger Moth - page 2

levels due to the action of predators, parasites, diseases, and cold winters. Because outbreaks are brief, defoliation is rare in landscape settings, and plant injury is unlikely, management efforts against tiger moth are rarely warranted.

Due to the potential for skin irritation and the preference for upper foliage, hand picking probably will not be a successful method of population reduction. Pruning to remove tents and applying insecticide treatments are unnecessary because new shoots will elongate in late spring and early summer and will grow to obscure defoliated portions of the uninjured tree.

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1. Cranshaw, W.S.; Leatherman, D.A.; Jacobi, W.R.; Mannix L. 2000. Insects and diseases of woody plants of the central Rockies. Bulletin 506A. Fort Collins, CO: Colorado State University, Cooperative Extension. 284 p.
 2. Furniss, R.L.; Carolin, V.M. 1977. Western forest insects. Misc. Publ. 1339. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. 654 p.

